

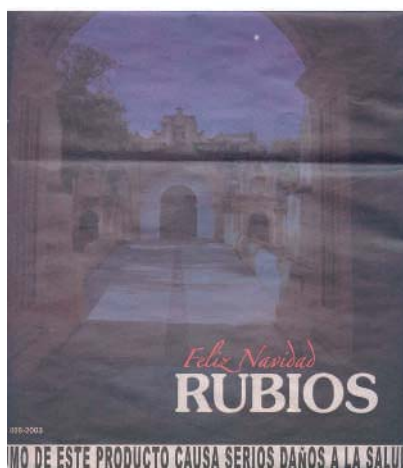
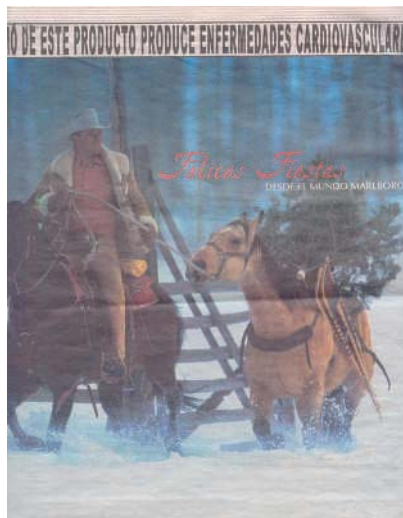
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When the “Yes, Prime Minister” team was considering topics for future episodes, Eddington suggested they cover the tobacco epidemic, and telephoned ASH to tell them to expect a call from the writers. The show’s central character, James Hacker MP, thought he was in charge of things but in reality was all too dependent on and manipulated by civil servants, led by the scheming Sir Humphrey Appleby. Sir Humphrey, whose agenda was usually somewhat different from that of his political master, was not immune to being manipulated himself, so the series was a natural for taking a satirical look at one of the greatest scandals of political negligence of our time.

The writers set to work on their research, including discussions with key public health people, to learn what went on behind the scenes to try to ensure that cigarette sales continued to flourish undisturbed. The ensuing episode, “The Smokescreen”, broadcast in 1986, was as hard hitting as it was hilarious, and can still be found in use as an entertaining teaching aid in discerning schools of public health the world over. At one point, in a robust defence of inaction encompassing many of the classic tobacco industry arguments and sophistries, Sir Humphrey pleaded with Hacker to recognise the economic heroism of smokers whose tobacco tax helped fund the health service, but whose early deaths relieved the state from having to pay their pensions: “We are saving many more lives than we otherwise could because of those smokers who voluntarily lay down their lives for their friends.” Incredible though it now seems, it was but a modest paraphrase of what some industry briefed politicians were saying at the time.

Guatemala: snow stopping ‘em

Some interesting examples of horses for courses in tobacco advertising were to be seen early this year in Guatemalan newspapers. Snow is about as common in Guatemala as palm trees in Antarctica, but when you are selling a myth to educated people, you can use a wide range of reference points. Philip Morris’s Marlboro brand is mostly smoked by the higher and middle socio-economic classes, so a pretty cowboy



Philip Morris ads for two of its brands marketed in Guatemala: snow and cowboys for upmarket Marlboro smokers, more traditional Guatemalan scenes for its local Rubios brand.

scene with snow is no barrier when wishing people a happy holiday season from the world of Marlboro.

However, Philip Morris also makes the local Rubios brand, smoked mainly by

people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, so for its “Merry Christmas” ad, a traditional Guatemalan scene, with a starlit courtyard looking suitably nativity-like for the Catholic audience, was more appropriate. It is all a long way from the total ad ban that is so urgently needed in Guatemala, as in all countries where tobacco promotion is still permitted. The big question is whether the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which Guatemala has already signed, will succeed in banishing ads like these for good—traditional scenes, cowboys, snow and all.

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Sri Lanka: exploiting the fallen

It is hard to believe that a tobacco company, responsible for pushing products that cause thousands of premature deaths every year, would have the nerve to sponsor a shrine to those who gave their lives for their fellow citizens, far less plaster its company logo all over it. But British American Tobacco’s (BAT’s) subsidiary in Sri Lanka, CTC, which shares the parent company’s none-too-subtle golden tobacco leaf as a logo, has done just that, at the National Remembrance Park opened in October 2002 in Kandy district, in the centre of the country.

CTC’s name and logo appear not only on signs leading visitors to and around the park, but prominently engraved for posterity on a stone memorial tablet at the solemn heart of the place, above the inscription: “In sincere appreciation of those who sacrificed their lives for our nation so that we may live in peace.”



BAT’s golden tobacco leaf logo is prominently displayed on a stone memorial tablet in Sri Lanka’s National Remembrance Park.



A young Sri Lankan protester "improving" one of the BAT sponsored signs in the Sri Lankan National Remembrance Park. The completed message read "CTC kills children".

Doubtless the BAT/CTC people responsible were sincere in their appreciation of the fallen, but a cynic might consider the irony that tobacco executives may hold a parallel, sincere appreciation of all those who are addicted to their company's products. These customers risk sacrificing their lives by the daily satisfaction of their addiction, in a commercial process encouraged by massive promotion, so that the executives and shareholders may live in greater personal, economic peace than might otherwise be likely.

Interestingly, the exploitation of such an important national landmark by a tobacco company has prompted one of the first acts of civil disobedience prompted by tobacco in a developing

country. In a scene reminiscent of BUGA-UP, that famous group of early graffitiists in Australia, a young Sri Lankan protester was captured on film "improving" one of the signs, as BUGA-UP might have put it. His message, when completed, read, "CTC kills children". Whether he had in mind children who die because of malnutrition due to the drain on family income caused by their fathers' addiction, or to future deaths among the children of today currently being recruited to smoking, the appearance of such protests must be worrying for tobacco companies.

Pakistan: seizing the moment

Not many of us have walked up to the head of state of our country and personally pointed out shortcomings in the government's public health policies, with prima facie evidence at hand to back up our case, far less repeated the process a few minutes later with the prime minister. But in March, Dr Saeed ul Majeed, president of the Pakistan College of Family Medicine, did precisely that. His audacious but exemplary use of the ultimate lobbying opportunity came at a ceremony in the capital, Islamabad, where he was one of an elite group being awarded the distinguished honour Tamgha-i-Imtiaz (Medal of Distinction), with which the government recognises distinguished merit in the fields of literature, arts, sports, medicine, and science.

After the investiture, Dr Majeed noticed people smoking in the hall, in contravention of Pakistan's law on smoking in public places. Wasting not

a second of time, he went up to the country's president, General Pervez Musharraf, and pointed out that the Ordinance issued by him against smoking in public places was being violated in his presence. He also mentioned his disappointment that Pakistan had not yet signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), despite the fact that 71 other countries had seen fit to do so. Next, he approached the prime minister and asked him to get the FCTC signed by the government—just like that; as one does. Like the consummate advocate that he clearly is, when he got home he wrote follow up letters to the president and the prime minister, with copies to the federal health minister, reinforcing the importance of signing the FCTC. That's the way to do it.

Australia: a career in cancer promotion?

Last year protests by staff and students at the University of Sydney saw the university senate vote to not endorse the chancellor's appointment of former state premier and current BAT Australia chair Nick Greiner to an advisory position in political science at the university. As if to rub salt into Greiner's public humiliation, the university then advised BAT that they were no longer welcome to set up a stand at the annual student careers fair and extol the virtues of working for a tobacco company—"You get to do lots of great stuff like talking to government and the media," one student was told by a gushing BAT staffer.

Website checks this March saw BAT poised to woo students at three other Sydney university careers fairs. Alerts to



Madagascar: selling dreams. Even in the poorest countries, such as Madagascar, whose more than 15 million inhabitants have an average annual income of around US\$250 and a life expectancy of under 60 years, there is always a market for tobacco. Cigarettes usually cost about US\$1 for 20, and advertisements such as the one shown above often portray a lifestyle far beyond the reach of most people. Imperial Tobacco of the UK, whose recent takeovers enable it to boast being the world's fourth largest tobacco company, has been investing there. One of the few links from its website's home page is to a section dealing with its operations in Madagascar, which it describes as its most extensive in Africa. Last year, Imperial launched its West brand at the Hilton hotel in the capital, Antananarivo, where West's much vaunted sponsorship of Formula One motor racing seemed about as far as could be imagined from the home made model cars handled by the country's younger generation.